History of Conservation Districts

Module XIII

What You Will Learn

- Formation of Conservation District Law.

- Chronological History of conservation districts and the State Conservation Commission.

The Dust Bowl

- During the 1930's, the Dust Bowl made the need to conserve natural resources, particularly soil, very clear.

Congress Acts

- On Capitol Hill, while testifying about the erosion problem, soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett drew back the curtains to reveal a sky blackened by dust.

- Congress immediately declared soil and water conservation a national policy and priority.

- Eventually the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was created under the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, to develop and implement soil erosion control programs.

The Need for Local Leadership

- It was soon clear that local leadership was needed to coordinate efforts of conservation agencies and tie them into local conditions and priorities. As a consequence, the U.S. Congress developed a model Conservation District Law, for consideration by state governments.

Soil and Water Conservation District Legislation considered by States

- National leaders realized that implementing conservation on private land would require the active participation of private landowners.
- The idea of soil and water conservation districts was born.
- President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote all state governors recommending states pass legislation to form soil and water conservation districts.

Conservation District Law

- In 1937 the State Conservation Committee was established by the Kansas Legislature with the enactment of the Kansas Conservation Districts Law.

Chronological History Highlights

- **1937 -** President urges all states to pass legislation authorizing a soil conservation program.

- **1937 -** Kansas legislature passes the Kansas Conservation Districts Law.

- **1937 -** The State Conservation Committee was established by the Kansas Legislature to promote soil and water conservation.

- **1938 -** The first Kansas conservation district is formed in Labette County.

- **1943 -** An employee of the State Extension Service, Mr. Reuben Lind, was instrumental in organizing and developing conservation districts serving as Committee Secretary.

- **1944 -** Kansas Association of Conservation Districts organized.

Chronological History Highlights (cont.)

- **1946 -** National Association of Conservation Districts formed.

- **1954 -** The last of the 105 Kansas Soil Conservation Districts formed.

- **1972 -** The State Soil Conservation Committee's name was changed to State Conservation Commission.

- **1989 -** The State Water Plan Special Revenue Fund was established providing funds to allow Kansas to address natural resource needs in a timely and effective manner.

- **2007** – State Aid to Conservation districts limit was raised to $25,000 annually

Review Question

1. What was the name of the soil scientist that testified before congress urging them to pass a soil conservation policy?

Review Answer

1. What was the name of the soil scientist that testified before congress urging them to pass a soil conservation policy?

    Hugh Hammond Bennett

Review Question

1.   What year was the Kansas Conservation District law enacted?

Review Answer

2. What year was the Kansas Conservation District law enacted?

   1937

Review Question

3. The first Kansas conservation district was formed in Shawnee County?

True of False?

Review Answer

3.   The first Kansas conservation district was formed in Shawnee County?

False. Labette County

Summary

- Today there are 105 local conservation districts in Kansas and more than 3000 across the nation.

- The elected conservation district supervisors have assisted in the implementation of more than $235 million in state cost share funds.

- Kansas conservation districts are strong as evidenced by the passage in 2007 of an increase to State Aid from $10,000 to $25,000.

Resources Available

- Kansas Conservation Districts Supervisors Handbook.

- "A History of Natural Resource Conservation In Kansas" by John Spurling.

- "History of Conservation in Kansas" www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/abent/kansas_history.html